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LOCAL NOTIONS OF PARTICIPATION AND DIVERSIFICATION OF GROUP ACTIVITIES IN SOUTHERN TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT Rural economy and livelihood in Mbinga used to have fully depended on coffee. However, due to the decline of economy under the influence of economic liberalisation, coffee production was declined, and the farmers have faced problems. Due to the changed situation, they began searching for economic opportunities and information, and this created the need to work together to solve problems. While having interaction with the SCSRD project, it has emerged as the *Sengu* Committee and the farmers' groups. The *Sengu* Committee was formed during the construction of a hydro-mill, and it was named as *sengu* so as to inherit the spirit of *sengu* and to work together with one aim. The formation of the *Sengu* Committee and the subsequent activities led to the establishment of farmers' groups, which carry out activities related to environmental conservation and diversification of economic activities. Some groups have engaged in reciprocal labour as part of group activities, others diversified capacity-built through group activities into other activities such as construction of water supply and a mini hydro-mill. Participation is taking place in different forms according to the context.

Key Words: Rural development; Environmental conservation; Process; Capacity building; Matengo

INTRODUCTION

Approaches to rural development have changed from the top-down and blueprint approach to the bottom-up approach. Participation, or participatory development, has been prominent since the 1980s, as have alternative development, endogenous development, and people-centred development. However, under the umbrella of participation, various phenomena have emerged, ranging from people's passive participation on the one hand to more self-mobilised initiatives and endogenous varieties of participation on the other. In addition, there has also emerged a strong need to develop methods to monitor and evaluate the complex processes and nature of new approaches that differ from the previous top-down and blueprint approaches. Since 1980s, Oakley (1991) had emphasised the importance of continuous monitoring in understanding the process of participation, and later on, Mosse (1998) proposed process documentation to understand the complexity evident in recent approaches. On the other hand, Long & Long (1992) proposed using the actor-oriented approach to examine the process created by development practices and interactions between different actors. Tsurumi (1999) also investigated interaction between inhabitants and outsiders in the context of endogenous development. In this article, I will look at the ongoing process of one of the rural development projects in Tanzania, by examining

how “participation” or “capacity development” take place in local and global contexts, and reconsider rural development.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

I. Briefings of the SCSRD Project

The Sokoine University of Agriculture, Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SCSRD) project was established to develop a method of sustainable rural development, the SUA Method, by undertaking activities in two model areas: the Matengo Highlands of the Mbinga District and the Uluguru Mountains of the Morogoro District in Tanzania. The SUA Method is based on the results and experiences of the earlier research cooperation project entitled “*Miombo* Woodlands Agro-ecological Research Project (MWARP).” The SUA Method has six characteristics, which are deeply related to each other. The first is the importance of understanding realities through fieldwork. The second is the recognition of “the potential of indigenesness” such as the indigenous resources, knowledge, wisdom, and norms that the community has nurtured and developed. The third characteristic emphasises participation and partnerships among various actors such as villagers, local government authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and donors. The fourth characteristic identifies “the focal feature” of the area, which relates closely to the sets of problems and opportunities that the community faces. The fifth characteristic is that the SUA Method is based on a learning process, supported by a strong feedback system. The last characteristic is the use of the process approach rather than the blueprint approach.⁽¹⁾

II. Mbinga District and the Project Site

The Mbinga District (Fig. 1) was one of the project sites throughout both the MWARP period (1994–1997) and the SCSRD project period (1999–2004). During the MWARP period, the main focus was on the indigenous cultivation system known as *ngolo*. The *ngolo* system was developed along the steep slopes of the Matengo Highlands and is unique to the Matengo. This system allows farmers to sustain soil fertility and prevent soil erosion. The Matengo cultivate maize and beans on *ngolo* farms and produce coffee as a cash crop. Both *ngolo* and coffee fields are located in a *ntambo*, which refers to the geographic unit on the mountainside circumscribed within the river tributaries. *Ntambo* is also a unit both for land ownership by the clan and for production and consumption for everyday life (JICA, 1998; Itani, 1998; Kakeya, 2001).

The Mbinga District is one of the major coffee-growing districts in Tanzania, and for a long time it enjoyed benefits from producing coffee. However, in 1993, the coffee market was liberalised, and in 1996 the Mbinga Cooperative

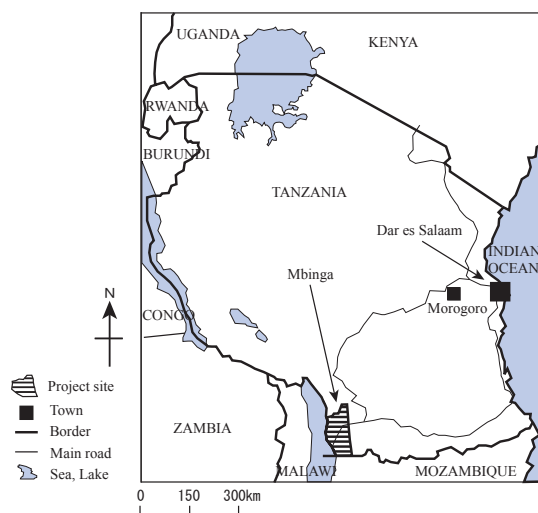


Fig. 1. Project site

Union (MBICU) collapsed as a result of increased competition after liberalisation. The MBICU previously undertook most of the activities related to coffee marketing and sales. Since its collapse, the farmers themselves have had to manage most of the activities formerly carried out by the MBICU. In addition, since the Tanzanian government accepted the Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986, economic liberalisation has been fostered and, as in other areas of Tanzania, people in Mbanga have had to pay fees for education and medical care. Their life has thus become increasingly difficult (SCSRD & JICA, 2004; Mhando, 2005).

Based on the results of the previous research project and further fieldwork during the SCSR project, economic stagnation and environmental degradation were recognised and identified as the main problems to be addressed. Following discussions with the District and the villagers, four aims were identified: 1) diversification of economic activities; 2) diversification of food materials and improvement of food security; 3) reduction of expenses; and 4) environmental regeneration and management. In the Mbanga District, SCSR worked mainly with the two villages of Kindimba and Kitanda, where experiences and adequate knowledge were gained during the *Miombo* research project, and a good rapport with the people had already been created. Kindimba Village, which is located on the western side of the mountain area of the Matengo Highlands, about 15 km west of the town of Mbanga, is one of the oldest villages in the Matengo Highlands. Kitanda Village is located in the rolling hills, and is one of the newly established villages that are inhabited by immigrants, who are mainly from the mountain areas (SCSRD & JICA, 2004).

RESEARCH METHODS AND SITES

During the SCSRD project period, many people participated in the project. I also obtained the opportunity to work in the SCSRD project as a JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) expert for a total of three years. After the termination of the project in April 2004, I conducted research, mainly in Kindimba Village, in May and from August to November 2005, and August 2006. The research site, Kindimba Village (Fig. 2) consists of eight sub-villages: Ndembo, Mkanya, Kindimba, Kitunda A, Kitunda B, Torongi, Walanzi, and Mtungu (Fig.3). In 2006, the total population was 2,440.⁽²⁾ For my research, I selected two sub-villages, Mtungu and Ndembo. I interviewed members of farmers' groups as well as the household surveys. I used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, including interviews and participant observation. Regarding the qualitative aspects of participation, continuous monitoring through participant observation and interviews is essential to understand such aspects as the emergence of a sense of solidarity and the capacity building of institutions and people.

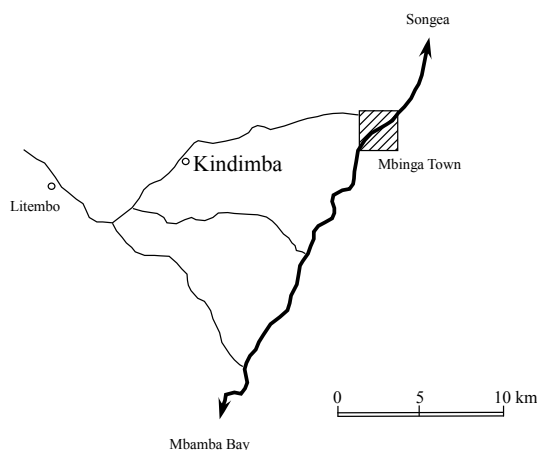


Fig. 2. Research site



Fig. 3. Sub-villages in Kindimba Village

HYDRO-MILL PROJECT AND THE *SENGU* COMMITTEE

Through rapport with villagers and discussion among the related stakeholders, a hydro-mill was selected to start among all the proposals. A hydro-mill is a grain-milling plant, which uses hydrologically generated power, and thus it is environmentally friendly. It helps reducing women's workload of pounding cereals and the milling cost at lower price than that of a diesel milling machine. In Mbinga, people were familiar to the hydro-mill since CARITAS (local NGO) had already installed six hydro-mill machines. Under this situation, in Kindimba Village, construction of a hydro-mill machine was launched in a collaborative effort that involved various stakeholders: the villagers of Kindimba, the Kindimba Village Government, the Mbinga District Council, CARITAS, and SCSRD/JICA. At the beginning of the project, there were different approaches and stances. SCSRD and the District emphasised a people-centred approach and capacity building through the construction of the hydro-mill. CARITAS, however, had assumed that this hydro-mill would be organised along the same lines as the previous hydro-mills with which it had been involved, and believed that the people would need help from outsiders to construct and maintain the hydro-mill. In early 2001, as a result of these differences in approaches and interests, several meetings were held to achieve a compromise. The negotiation process involved different stakeholders and established a village committee for the project. The name of the people's committee was subject to discussion. The committee members proposed the name *sengu*. *Sengu* is a Matengo word, and it means a place where villagers assemble and discuss various issues. The committee members explained that they had thought about their mission, and had decided to call it *sengu* to challenge the villagers to work together, as *sengu* had once done. During the construction of the hydro-mill, the *Sengu* Committee became a core organisation that exercised strong leadership to ensure that the villagers worked together to complete the project (SCSRD & JICA, 2004; Araki, 2006).

With good participation, the construction was carried out and completed in 2002. Various factors fostered the participation of all villagers, including motivation of reducing women's workloads, a lower price than the diesel milling machine, and additional sources of village income as well as effective partnerships among all the actors. Furthermore, naming the group *Sengu* seemed to have some influence on the people. Oakley (1991) stated that participation as a means can be distinguished from participation as an end. In participation as a means, participation is used to achieve some goals or objectives. In contrast, participation as an end implies a process that develops and strengthens the capabilities of the people. The construction of the hydro-mill might be considered participation as a means, but it was followed by participatory tree nursery management. The villagers understood that it was important to maintain the environment, because otherwise their hydro-mill would never be sustained. The *Sengu* Committee and the later emerging farmers' groups became the central force in promoting environmental conservation and managing the tree nursery centre to promote afforestation, by using the benefits from the hydro-mill

and providing tree seedlings to villagers free of charge or at low cost. On the other hand, there also arose some problems such as power politics in the village responding to “empowerment” of *Sengu* Committee and overburdened work for them. Although it took time, those problems were solved one by one. This example of capacity building, in which qualitative change occurred, can be also considered participation as an end.

DYNAMICS OF GROUP ACTIVITIES

A different approach was taken for the other project site, Kitanda Village. Instead of involving all villagers, the farmers’ groups were at the core of this approach. The first group, *Ujamaa*, was formed in Kitanda. As mentioned in the previous section, there were four aims: 1) diversification of economic activities, 2) diversification of food materials and improvement of food security, 3) reduction of expense, and 4) environmental regeneration and management. To meet these aims, various activities and trials, such as valley bottom cultivation, fish farming, bee keeping, and tree nursery, were planned and carried out mainly by *Ujamaa*, through occasional dialogue with outsiders. Thereafter, combination of valley bottom cultivation, fish farming, bee keeping, and tree nursery became the basis for group activities (SCSRD & JICA, 2004).

Here, I shall look at how these activities have spread. The villagers first carefully observed the *Ujamaa*’s trials and errors, but when they realised that something was worth trying, many villagers undertook the same activities, especially digging ponds. All at once, fish farming attracted people, and as the fish pond became the centre of activity for a group, groups spread first within Kitanda, then to neighbouring villages, and eventually even to Kindimba.

Jiokoe was the first group in Kindimba, which began in January 2003. The first leader of *Jiokoe* visited Kitanda and was impressed by the group activities, especially fish farming. On his return to Kindimba, he began to dig a fish pond himself, but later he realised that it would be better to organise a group. The group called *Jiokoe* was then formed, not only for fish farming but also for other activities such as bee keeping, vegetable production, and environmental conservation. The members of *Jiokoe* were all related. The first leader mentioned that he had wanted to train his cousins, nephews, and nieces in the same *ntambo* called Mapelele. It seems that the initial motivation was fish although the members later emphasised the importance of helping each other on the farms and in their daily life through *Jiokoe*.

Once *Jiokoe* being organized in Ndembo sub-village, ideas of group activities spread to other sub-villages by different ways such as observing *Jiokoe*’s activities, attending the farmer’s workshops and exchanges organized by the SCSRD, and being influenced by *Sengu* Committee’s visit and meetings at each sub-village. By 2006, 12 groups had been formed in Kindimba Village: *Jiokoe* and *Nguvu Kazi* (Ndembo sub-village), *Ondoa Umaskini* (Kitunda sub-village), *Uhusiano Mwema*, *Amani*, *Upendo* (Mtungu sub-village), *Jitihada*, *Twende na Wakati*

(Walanzi sub-village), *Jikwamwe*, *Muungano*, and *Jitegemee Tupate Maendeleo* (Torongi sub-village), and *Jiendeleze* (Kindimba sub-village).

Here, I present one group named *Nguvu Kazi* as an example and examine it in detail. In 2003, after attending the workshop for farmers' groups and being influenced by *Jiokoe*, the village chairman and the Ndembo sub-village chairman thought about starting a group. The members all consisted of *ntambo* of Ndembo except Mapelele, where *Jiokoe* was already established. The founders recruited those who were active and had the ability to undertake new challenges, while they expected the others to observe the activities and to join the group later, if the activities went well.

This strategy worked well within the group. Group members worked well together in group activities, and carry out combination of activities such as valley bottom cultivation, fish farming, bee keeping, and tree nursery like other groups. In addition, they started to work on the members' fields in turn by getting an idea from *ngokela* (reciprocal labour), and regarded it as part of their group activities.⁽³⁾ They mentioned: "Our system is better than *ngokela*. We do not have to prepare for good food with meat and local beer which *ngokela* requires. We work hard and fast on each member's field, while those who participate in *ngokela* do not always work as hard as the host expect." In fact, according to their group note, from December 2003 to December 2005, they met totally 81 times. They spent 36 times working on members' fields, while using the rest of the time for meetings and group activities. Majority of members mentioned that the first reason to join the group was to help each other rather than doing group activities. This indicates that this group was not just doing what outsiders or other groups did, but was adjusting and modifying the activities to fit its own context.

The activities on which each group puts the most emphasis are different from group to group. *Nguvu Kazi* emphasised tree planting and bee keeping. In January 2004, they planted 1,000 tree seedlings, along with 20 log hives for beekeeping, halfway up Mt. Appongo, and they planted 3,400 tree seedlings at the top of the mountain. They expected to use the trees in future as fuel and building materials, and also to sell them. In addition, some ritual trees such as *mtewalambamba* (*Tabernaemontana ventricosa*) were planted. Since ritual trees are not allowed to cut, this shows their concern to surrounding environment. During the construction of the hydro-mill, they had seen the importance and gained actual experience of environmental conservation, which should have influenced and encouraged them to launch tree planting.

However, although they spent time and energy in tree planting, in November 2005, a bush fire burned the planted trees and the bee hives of the group. The group members were not sure whether the fire was accidental or intentional. Whatever the cause, they were greatly disappointed and lost the motivation to continue. Some other groups had faced problems such as ponds being damaged or fish being stolen, which also resulted in the groups fading away. This provides a clue to reconsider sustainability of a group. How a group solves problems when they arise is a key issue in sustaining the group. In the case

of *Nguvu Kazi*, before this incident, they had already nurtured enough solidarity through regular meetings, group activities, and helping each other on farm and daily work. Therefore, even when they had to face the problems created by the fire, they were able to continue group activities. In other words, a group is formed not only for achieving some tangible aims but also gaining solidarity.

Participation also has other aspects. *Nguvu Kazi* recruited those who were active and had the ability to try new things. They expected others to observe the activities and to join the group later, but some of the villagers felt “left out,” and were unwilling to participate in group activities. Some female-headed households were also reluctant to join the group activities, because the membership consisted basically of couples. It should be in mind that participation has positive and negative aspects.

HOW TO MEASURE CAPACITY BUILDING AND SUSTAINABILITY

In the sub-village of Mtungu, three groups were motivated or influenced by the SCSRD project: *Uhusiano Mwema*, *Amani*, and *Upendo*. *Uhusiano Mwema* was established in April 2003 with 13 members. *Amani* was formed in February 2004 with 21 members, and *Upendo* was initiated in April 2004 with 21 members. This sub-village has about 40 households, and about three-quarters of them participate in group activities. Fish farming seems to be the most popular activity in Mtungu. In addition to the three groups, nearly all the households have fish ponds. By June 2006, 36 fish ponds had been dug. Concerning the membership, except in the case of elderly couples, or either husband or wife being sick, both husband and wife/wives become members, for the following reasons. First, each person is allowed to obtain 20 to 25 fingerlings from the group pond; therefore, if two or three members of the household join the group, they can obtain two or three times as much as one member's share. Second, people mentioned the sustainability of the activities at the household level. If one member of a couple becomes sick or is involved in other activities, the other can still participate in group activities. Even when one person dies, the remaining family members can continue the activities. One extended family developed the strategy of sending members to different groups to maximise its benefits, such as the number of fingerlings, information, and technology obtained.

In 2006, fewer group activities were undertaken than before. Instead, Mtungu sub-villagers spent more time and effort in constructing the water supply and the mini hydro-mill machine. The mini hydro-mill project had been a pending issue since the very beginning of construction of the hydro-mill in Kindimba in 2000. Because Mtungu is located far from the mill machine, there was some argument as to whether they should participate in its construction. The villagers decided to participate and have used the hydro-mill machine, although it requires a round trip of about 1.5 hours from home to the mill machine and back, with carrying heavy loads. In 2005, there arose the possibility of constructing a mini hydro-mill machine made of local materials. People in Mtungu

and the neighbouring sub-village of Mkanya discussed this option and planned it with the *Sengu* Committee, the village government and other stakeholders such as the District. The committee, consisting of five members from Mtungu and Mkanya sub-villages, was formed in November 2005, and was named the *Sengu Ndogo* (small *sengu*). It started planning and constructing the mini hydro-mill, with advice from the *Sengu* Committee.

The case of Mtungu shows that it should be important to consider not only the number of groups and the continuation of group activities but also how capacity has been built and developed, and how capacity can arise. In Mtungu, the villagers built capacity via different activities and used it for various purposes, in this case the provision of a water supply and the construction of a small hydro-mill machine.

CHANGING NATURE OF THE *SENGU* COMMITTEE

Mundeki Village, which is next to Kindimba Village, has also used the Kindimba hydro-mill from the beginning, and the Mundeki Village Government showed increased interest in constructing its own mini-hydro mill machine. They invited the *Sengu* Committee to relate their experiences and to give advice. *Sengu* responded well, and provided not only practical advice but also emphasised the importance of both environmental conservation and institutional building to sustain the mill machine from their own learning. In both Mtungu sub-village and Mundeki Village, the *Sengu* Committee played an important role, and regarded themselves as the “mother” supervising other hydro-mills constructed by her “children.”

By considering coffee-related issues, another aspect of the changing nature of *Sengu* Committee becomes evident. Around May 2005, they thought that the management of the hydro-milling machine had gone well, and that it was time to begin dealing with coffee issues seriously, since coffee was the major crop for the Matengo. They organised a coffee seminar together with the Manager of the Ugano Coffee Research Centre, a branch of the Tanzania Coffee Research Institute (TaCRI). TaCRI provides coffee producers with relevant and practical technological innovations, as well as advice on improving productivity and quality. Among its other activities, TaCRI has recently launched an initiative to increase and distribute coffee berry disease resistant varieties (new hybrids) to farmers to reduce the incidence of disease. It has also offered to train farmers' groups in the proper control of diseases and insects. In addition to the on-station nursery for new hybrids, TaCRI has made efforts to expand the nursery, to distribute coffee hybrids to farmers' groups, and to supervise the construction of gardening boxes for selected farmers' groups that were ready to receive bare rooted cuttings. In the Mbinga District, more than 80 groups started under TaCRI, but only one such group exists in Kindimba. This group, which is called *Jitahidi*, is located in Ndembo sub-village and had an initial membership of 20. Basically, those who had not joined *Nguvu Kazi* or *Jiokoe* became members of *Jitahidi*.

Some households sent family members to different groups to maximise their benefits.⁽⁴⁾

As mentioned above, the *Sengu* Committee together with TaCRI made efforts to sensitise the villagers to coffee issues, but it failed to attract the people. Over time, despite their efforts, things did not work out well. On the other hand, in 2006, the *Sengu* Committee strengthened its membership by adding three members, instead of replacing present members with new members. They did not think the committee had matured and empowered itself enough; it still needed to work hard to maintain its present membership. Furthermore, based on the *Sengu* Committee, a new group was formed called VUWAWA (Catholic Workers' Movement), the main activities of which are producing coffee hybrids, selling coffee seedlings, and crop bank. This coffee-related group was formed because of their frustration at not receiving a positive reaction to their sensitisation of coffee issues, and to organise coffee seminars for groups. Second, employees in the nursery near the hydro-mill did not take good care of the nursery. *Sengu* members mentioned: "We have continuing problems with the nursery workers. Since it is not their nursery, they did not commit to taking care of it. We would like to take better care of the nursery by ourselves. VUWAWA is open to anyone, but instead of following the former principle of serving public, this is more for private purposes. This is just like an ordinary group (*kikundi*).” In August 2006, they built the nursery to promote seedlings of coffee hybrids. At almost the same time, *Jitahidi*, which had increased its membership, also started building a nursery for coffee hybrids. It should be noted that core members of *Nguvu Kazi* and *Jiokoe* joined *Jitahidi*, instead of adding coffee-related activities to their own group activities.

CONCLUSION

The SCSRD project set out to develop a method for sustainable rural development, the SUA Method, through activities in two model areas in Tanzania. One activity, in the Mbinga District, was the construction of a hydro-mill. During the negotiation process between different actors, the people's committee, the *Sengu* Committee, was formed. The members decided to name the committee *Sengu* so as to inherit the spirit of *sengu* and to challenge themselves to work together with one aim. The formation of the committee and the subsequent activities led to the establishment of farmers' groups, which carry out activities related to environmental conservation and the diversification of economic activities through bee keeping, fish farming, a tree nursery, and valley bottom cultivation. Some groups have engaged in working on members' fields as part of group activities, others diversified capacity-built through group activities into other activities such as construction of water supply and a mini hydro-mill. Participation is, thus, taking place in different forms according to the context.

These phenomena seen in rural development project should be also examined in macro situation. The Matengo farmers have faced problems related to cof-

fee cultivation and marketing that were caused by economic liberalisation. After the Mbinga Cooperative Union (MBICU) collapsed, the farmers had to deal with most of the activities that the MBICU had previously conducted on their behalf. Due to the changed situation, the farmers began searching for economic opportunities and for information, and this created the need to work together to solve problems. It has, thus, emerged as the *Sengu* Committee and the farmers' groups while having interaction with the project. Farmers' groups are formed not only for achieving some tangible aims but also gaining or strengthen solidarity as observed in the case of one group. Furthermore, characteristics of the committee and groups have been changing according to the situation.

Finally, there has been a tendency for tangible results to be required from development projects within a limited time span. However, such projects are only a part of "rural development" of an area. It should be emphasised that it is equally important to consider the influence that a project has in the long term, both locally and in a wider area, and how the interaction between insiders and outsiders has digested and internalised in the area. There arose a strong need to continue monitoring the on-going process, and to conduct a deeper analysis of the phenomena involved, which would lead to effective feedback to development practices.

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NOTES

- (1) The details of these characteristics and the actual cases of project sites are documented in SCSRD & JICA (2004).
- (2) The population data of Kindimba was collected in August 2006 from the village headman.
- (3) In near future, *Nguvu Kazi* expects to start mutual financing association(*kupeana*) as one of the group activities in addition to the savings and micro-credit scheme.
- (4) These information are from the interviews with the Director of TaCRI and TaCRI (2005).

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